

**CHARLES TAYLOR MASTER
MECHANIC'S AWARD**

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2003**

FRED DUNCANSON



Duncanson, Fred "Dunk" Fred

Duncanson, better known to his friends as "Dunk", was born on February 22, 1929, in Tonganoxie, Kansas. He was one of 11 children. He was the baby of the family and claims that his parents said, "since they couldn't improve on him, they decided not to have any more children!"

While growing up Dunk worked as a handyman and tool dresser, drilling water and gas wells. In school, he loved to participate in all types of sports. In 1947, he graduated from high school in Tonganoxie, Kansas, and applied to the military under the Barksdale Letter Program. He was offered and accepted a place in the Airframe and Engine Program.

Dunk started Air Force basic training in July of 1948, and in May of the following year he graduated from the Airframe and Engine Program at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi. Upon graduation, he was offered an instructor position and taught in the Fundamentals Department. One of his first challenges was to help relocate the school from Keesler to Shepherd Air Force Base in Texas. Dunk remained at Shepherd until December 1949, when he volunteered

for an instructor position at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

As things often turn out in the military, when Dunk arrived at Lackland he learned that the instructor position was actually for a math instructor! Since Dunk had not yet received this training himself, the military quickly reassigned him to flight line duties at Kelly Airfield. At Kelly, Dunk worked as a line mechanic on many different aircraft, including the AT6, B25, B26, B29, C45, C45, D8 and P51.

At Lackland, Dunk met the love of his life, Gladys, better known to her friends as "Hap". Hap grew up in North Dakota where she worked as a teacher at a small country school. Although, she had no formal training as a teacher, the local superintendent certified her and gave her the job. Hap says that she ended up in San Antonio after Hap stood in front of a map, with her eyes closed, made a few circles with her finger, and placed it on the map in front of her. She and her cousin set off for San Antonio, with \$200 and a suitcase apiece. In San Antonio, Hap got a job at the Base Exchange where she eventually met Dunk. When she first saw him, he was standing with her landlord and smiling like a Cheshire cat! She recalls that her first impressions was, "who in the world is that man?"

In December of 1952, Dunk received orders to go to Japan in support of the Korean War effort. He was stationed at Brady Air Force Base and assigned to the Repair and Reclamation Branch. As part of his duties, Dunk overhauled and refurbished the C45 aircraft. He also performed maintenance for the 60th troop carrier wing and became the Wing

Maintenance Inspector. Dunk was also in charge of the contract with Bridgestone for the repair of aircraft tires. He said, that the PSP, which is the metal used to make temporary runways during the war, really tore up the tires. They were only allowed ten repairs per tire but, according to Dunk, the rather crude repair process worked well and the tires never leaked.

During his last year in Japan, Dunk played tackle for the Bradley football team. When he finally returned to the United States in December of 1954, Hap said, that he looked, "might fine"! Dunk invited Hap to Christmas that year. She recalls that everything was very proper back then, and she stayed at his brother's house and he stayed at his sister's house six blocks away. Dunk finally go up the nerve to ask Hap to marry him and the wedding took place on April 9, 1955. Today the family consists of a daughter, Sue Ellen and a son Neal Patrick. Sue Ellen still lives with her family in Fairbanks and Neal who followed in his father's footsteps, is now a major in the Air Force.

After returning from Japan, Dunk was assigned to James Connell Air Force Base near Waco, Texas. Here he maintained the Convair T-29 aircraft. In March of 1957, he was reassigned to Jiddah, Saudi Arabia. This was a remote tour and he left his wife and new daughter in the States. In Saudi, Dunk was an advisor on C123 and B26 aircraft. He also crewed on the Ambassador's VC7. Dunk says that the ambassador's aircraft was considered plush because it had a plywood panel and a "hot cup" or galley as we call it today.

Upon returning to the States in March of 1958, Dunk and his family reported to Hunter Air Force Base in Georgia. When they arrived at Hunter, they were told by the housing official that, although pets were allowed in the quarters, children were not! Obviously, they were not happy about this. Hap also remembers that her time at Hunter was so boring, she actually completed most of the the twenty-one volume Aircraft Maintenance Officers' Course for Dunk. Meanwhile, Dunk worked in Transit Alert, retrieving parachutes from B47 aircraft. The Duncansons' wanted out and although the base was severely overstaffed they were told "no". Luck struck one day when Dunk's immediate boss went out for a long lunch and left him in charge. The phone rang and the voice on the other end was looking for volunteers to cross-train into the Missile Service. Dunk jumped at the opportunity and after a mere seventy-five days, the Duncansons' left Hunter Air Force Base.

Dunk trained for thirty days in Tucson, Arizona on the Thor missile at the Douglas factory school. Dunk recalls that the food in the cafeteria was so bad the employees brought their own brown-bag lunch!

On September 1, 1958, Dunk and his family arrived at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Hap says the housing was great and, since kids were allowed, they decided to add another! On February 19, 1959, Neal Patrick was born.

The next several years found Dunk working at various missile sites throughout the country. Dunk worked on the Thor, Atlas and Titan missiles.

According to Hap, one of Dunk's greatest achievements occurred in the spring of 1966, when he became a Flight Engineer. Dunk attended the basic course at Shepherd Air Force Base and received C141 training at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. When his training was complete, he received an assignment to Norton Air Force Base in Rialto, California, where he flew four missions a month to Vietnam over the next two and one-half years.

On August 1, 1969, after twenty-one years in the Air Force, Dunk retired. On August 5, 1969, he became an FAA certificated Airframe and Power plant Mechanic. Dunk's first contact in Alaska was with Lou Applegate who referred him to Merlin Barkdull. Interestingly enough, both Lou and Merlin are previous recipients of the Charles Taylor Award. Merlin hired him, sight unseen, and on September 15, 1969, he went to work for Interior Airways in Fairbanks for five dollars and fifty cents per hour. While working at Interior Airways, later known as Alaska International Air, Dunk worked on the C-130, C-46, C-47, Beech D-50 and Cessna 185 aircraft. When Alaska International Air went bankrupt in August of 1970, Dunk went to work for Fairbanks Flying Service out of Phillips Field until Alaska International Air re-grouped and hired him back.

At that point in his life, Dunk took a big step and decided to go back to school. In September of 1972, Dunk, Hap and Sue Ellen all enrolled at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. They even had one communications class together. After this traumatic experience Sue Ellen quit UAF but returned later to

complete her degree. Although he kept very busy in college, Dunk managed to work part-time rebuilding brake for the C-130 and spent the summer of 1973 working for Pacific Alaska, repairing Borate Fire Bombers.

After college, Dunk worked at various places throughout Fairbanks, including Alaska International Air and Fairbanks Motors. He also worked as the Director of Maintenance at Frontier Flying Service. There he maintained DC-3's, Cessna 206 and 207's and 402's. Other than a brief move back to Washington for a job working in the automotive industry, Dunk has remained in the place he loves, Alaska.

Dunk's final foray in the aviation field was with Dennis Parrish as the Director of Maintenance for Aurora Air Service from March of 1982 to February 1983. After that, Dunk went back to work for Fairbanks Motors at the service manager, until he retired in December 1994.

Since retirement, Dunk has been active in the American Legion, VFW and Elks. He still loves aircraft and hates yard work. His favorite activity, other than his two grandchildren, Alexander, 6 and Hanna Rose, 8 is playing pool.